

Christianity
and Miracles
At the Present Day.

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THE PRESENT DAY.

CHRISTIANITY

BY

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"UNBELIEF IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY."



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THE ARGUMENT IN BRIEF.

MIRACLES are shown to be, on the supposition of the existence of God, neither impossible in themselves, inconsistent with the order of nature, incapable of being proved by testimony, nor incapable of being decisively connected with God.

The marvellous character of the Bible, the transcendent character of the morality of the Bible, the harmony of the miracles of the Bible with its doctrine, are shown to be presumptions in favor of the miracles of Scripture.

The historical testimony to the miracles of the New Testament, and especially our Lord's Resurrection, is examined, and its bearing on this fact is shown. The Resurrection of Christ is shown to account for all the undeniable facts of the history, and the insufficiency of any theory that denies its reality to account for them is proved.

CHRISTIANITY AND MIRACLES,

AT THE PRESENT DAY.

THE alliance between Christianity and miracles is of long standing, in fact is inherited from the Old Testament religion; and for eighteen centuries, friend and foe have been here agreed, the one rallying to this position as an intrenchment of their own; the other, though sometimes affecting to despise it, not less looking askance upon it as an adverse stronghold. In our unsettled time, when everything is questioned, and not a little rashly abandoned, the argument for the truth of Christianity from miracles is in some quarters less insisted on. There are even Christian minds that have begun to waver at this point; while others, on the opposite side, are perhaps nearer believing their own illusive difficulties than at any former period. I am persuaded, however, that this discrediting of miracles is a great mistake, and that no procedure could be less wise than that of writers in the Christian ranks who seek here to

change front in the midst of action. Christianity—if it be worth anything as a remedy—is so essentially supernatural in its inmost essence and provisions that it cannot be detached from miracles without losing its virtue; and though there may be shades and varieties as well as improvements, in the way of putting this argument, nay, lawful differences as to its ultimate value in relation to other grounds of Christian belief, it must still take rank as a leading proof; and the nineteenth century, not less than the first, must accept of Christ's own challenge, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not." Persuaded then, with ever-growing conviction, of the solidity of this argument, and of the futility of the objections drawn from metaphysics, from history, and from science against it, I shall endeavor, within the compass of this tract, to set it forth in the light of the present day.

It is necessary, in discussing this question, to begin with some DEFINITION OF A MIRACLE, so as to understand in what sense it is here employed. It may be spoken of then as an act of God which visibly deviates from the ordinary working of his power, designed, while capable of serving other uses, to authenticate a divine message. This restricts the argument to theists. Unless there be belief in a God able and willing

to make and attest a revelation, the whole argument from miracles is below the horizon. Had Hume been more thorough-going he would have taken his stand against miracles as excluded by his skepticism as to God. Had Spinoza been more open in his earlier treatise, he would not, while professing to believe in God, have assumed that the wisdom of God did not admit of either a revelation or such a proof of it; for this belonged to his later pantheism. And had Strauss, in our own days, been a more strict controversialist, he would not have wasted so much of his life in criticising the discords of the evangelists, but would have rested in his fundamental exclusion of God, that made the whole scheme of Christianity from the first incredible and subversive of reason. No one has been here more candid than the late Mr. John S. Mill. He sees that miracles belong to, and only belong to, the supposition of theism; and whatever may be thought of his objections to them, as not sufficiently proved to have existed in God's actual world, he deserves great credit for having admitted that the belief in miracles is perfectly rational on the part of a believer in God, and that it is a question of evidence and not of *a priori* theory.

With this preliminary clearing up of the state, and even of the terms, of the question, a number

of MISTAKES ABOUT MIRACLES that have gathered round it fall away of themselves. Some of these may be briefly noticed. The first mistake is, *that miracles are impossible*. To this much of the skepticism of our time verges, even where it does not bluntly assert it. Possibly this may be, because our belief has found by experience that it is not safe to grant so much as the being of a moral and personal Deity. Miracles, of course, fall with the denial of the only Being who can exercise a moral government, who can, in connection with that government, make a revelation, and who can so work in the physical world as to connect that revelation with his own divine power. It is seen at once that if God be possible, miracles are possible; and that hence nothing can preclude them but abstract atheism, or pantheism, or such agnosticism as makes the knowledge of God hopeless. It is a great consolation to the Christian that his belief in miracles can only be uprooted by virtual denial of God.

A second mistake, not so extreme, but still serious, is, that miracles are *inconsistent with the order of nature*. In so far as this puts nature in the place of God, and keeps him bound, as nature is without him held to be, by absolutely invariable laws, this is the same denial of God that has been already considered. So far, however, as the

position taken is that God has chosen to act in ways so invariable as to exclude miracle, and has revealed to us that choice, the distinction thus drawn easily leads to the discovery of the mistake. There would need to be full and conclusive evidence that it is God's will and choice to exclude miracle altogether from the realm of what is called nature, but which is only to a theist the field of God's own working. Is there, then, this full and conclusive evidence? It cannot be by revelation: for this would be to bring in revelation to exclude revelation. It can only be by what is called the light of nature; and the question recurs, Does the light of nature absolutely exclude any possible deviation by God from the wonted sequences of his operation? This would exclude every beginning and end of the universe, and every cosmical change that was not in the strictest sense the working out of foregoing law. On what can a skepticism so rigorous be based? It has been attempted to base it on our primary belief in the uniformity of nature, which is thus regarded as the voice of God to us warning us against trust in miracles. But is this so? Philosophers still dispute as to how far the expectation of uniformity in nature is a rational principle of knowledge or a mere instinct. But one thing is clear, that it cannot exclude the weighing of evidence for miracle;

otherwise, the origin or end of the world, considered as a scientific possibility, would be as summarily rejected as any hypothesis confessedly against reason. Canon Mozley has shown conclusively against Mr. Mill that the progress of science cannot exclude belief in miracle, for the very principle of induction on which science builds involves itself this prior belief in the uniformity of nature, which can thus receive from science no greater strength than it has at first. Nothing is more strange than the language of Mr. Mill as to the growing impossibility of belief in miracle as science advances; for this would leave the belief a scientific one to Sir Isaac Newton, or even to Hume and Gibbon, and deny it as such to Professor Huxley or Renan; not to mention that this assertion is entirely opposed to facts, as some of the most eminent men of science are still believers in miracles; and Mr. Mill himself finds a consolation in clinging to their possibility and the supernatural mission of Jesus Christ. The admission of miracles does not at all depend on a lax or unscientific conception of the course of nature. In fact, it can only build on recognized natural laws; and the discernment of these, and of exceptions to them, was as possible in the first century as in the nineteenth, as the words in the gospel history indicate: "Since the world be-

gan was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind." This limited, exceptional, divinely-regulated minimum of deviation, which leaves nature and science still standing as before, is all that Christianity asks in order to start this argument, and no principle of natural belief can pronounce the postulate inadmissible.

Besides, it is to be remembered that while in one sense miracles set aside law, in another and deeper sense they uphold it. The end of miracle, through the coming and works of Christ, is the restoration of moral order. The coming of Christ as a sinless Being is a miracle. Christianity is not an ordinary history, or even a great moral system incorporated with the life of its founder. It is, if it is anything, a system of redemption, based on the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, with a sequel of eternal results and issues, greater through union with Christ or separation from him than the ordinary immortality with its hopes and fears. This scheme is wrought out by the life and death, the dominion and influence, the second coming to judgment, and endless reign of Jesus Christ. Now this whole plan and system transcends natural laws, in any common acceptance of the word. It is believed to be in harmony with the highest laws of the Divine nature, and

to be the most glorious expression of them. But it is born of and lives by miracle, so that to refuse faith in this is to make sin the order of the universe. And if Christ needed to displace physical law in order to vindicate and restore moral and spiritual law, the conception of the universe which would exclude this interference is really a materialistic superstition, and so far from exalting God as the God of order, it surrounds him and his creatures with an outward barrier that shuts the way even to the "tree of life." It is by dwelling on the order of nature without that a prejudice against miracles has been created. A glance at the disorder of nature within restores the balance; and with the need, recalls the probability of a remedy, and of a remedy attended by miracle.

A *third* mistake as to miracles is, *that even if wrought, they could not be proved by testimony.* This is the celebrated argument of Hume, first published in a set of his essays in 1748, but which has not carried conviction, as he expected, and has even lately been declared by Mr. Mill to be inconclusive. Mr. Mill, in his "Essay on Theism," p. 217, says, "It is evidently impossible to maintain that if a supernatural fact really occurs, proof of its occurrence cannot be accessible to the human faculties. The evidence of the senses could prove this as it can prove other things."

Hume, however, never looks the senses, in connection with miracles, in the face. He dwells exclusively on testimony, and thus tacitly leaves it to be supposed that miracles are only matters of testimony; and this testimony he makes necessarily fallacious: for his argument is that our confidence in testimony being due entirely to experience, can never warrant our believing any reported departure from experience. If Hume had gone farther back, and supposed an eye-witness dealing with a miracle, he could not have advised that eye-witness to reject the miracle simply because the testimony of others had never reported anything like it; and then that eye-witness could not have been reasonably disbelieved himself, since testimony could not fail to convey what sense had vouched for. Hume, it is true, could not himself believe a miracle, because his philosophy left him in total doubt as to God. But it was otherwise with believers in God: and his assault on testimony had no value except as resting on his own premises. It may be added that there is a shadow of Hume's error in the not uncommon objection to miracles, that they lose their force with time, and at length vanish away. Why should this be so with miracles more than with secular history? The death of Ananias and Sapphira is as near to us as the assassination of Julius Cæsar. Tradition

loses its weight by successive removes, but not written history. Grant that the apostle John is the author of the fourth Gospel, his testimony is as good to us as if we had received it orally from himself. There is a signal absence of the historical sense in this objection; and there is no reason to think that a historian like Hume, if he could have granted miracles as once credible, would have supposed them decaying, though this idea only carries his distrust in testimony to a more paradoxical extreme.

The three mistakes as to miracles which have been considered are all due to forgetfulness of the fact that miracle appeals to a prior belief in God; and they are redressed when his agency and relation to nature are recalled to view. The same thing holds true of a *fourth* mistake, and the last which we shall notice, which still exerts a disturbing influence on some judgments: namely, *that miracles cannot be so decisively connected with God as to lend any sanction to an alleged revelation.* There is evidently no force in the general allegation that mere power can lend no support to teaching: for power is appealed to as a link to connect the teaching with God; and if such a connection be secured, its authority is then boundless. All ages have felt this, and have reëchoed the simple confession of Nicodemus: "We know

that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him." But the complaint is that though the connection, if it could be made out, would serve the end, the connection cannot be decisively established, since works apparently miraculous may still be due to ordinary laws, and not to divine interposition, or may even (so it is pleaded on Scripture grounds) be wrought by evil beings. This objection has often been taken, and is renewed, among others, by the author of "Supernatural Religion."

Now it may be granted that at times the defenders of revelation have undertaken too much by speaking as if a line could in all cases be drawn to mark off miracle from nature; whereas it was enough to fix on the leading miracles of the Bible as decisively supernatural in their character, since with these alone was there any concern: and it may be also admitted that Christian writers have differed somewhat in their interpretation of those passages of Scripture which connect miracle, or the appearance of it, with evil agency. Neither of these circumstances, however, abates the evidential value of the Bible miracles. They still stand out as sharply as ever—distinguished from all natural phenomena. It is because rationalism could not reduce them to natural facts

that it tried to make them myths. No science can ever reduce to its uniformities a fact, if fact it be, like the death of the firstborn in one night. The cures of our Lord seem still as little like the fruits of secret medical knowledge as in his own day; while the most thorough-going skepticism rejects most scornfully the theory that his resurrection was a mere natural recovery from an incompleted death. There is thus in the miracles of the Bible—abating some obscure instances—a broad stamp of distinction from extraordinary, though still natural phenomena; while there is a plan, a method, a reigning spirit, which takes them completely out of the region of the mere random wonders and portents of Livy, or the childish marvels of the later ecclesiastical historians. It may be confidently affirmed that if the Bible miracles are not recognizably divine, none can be so; and thus the extremely skeptical position would be reached, that a Being who wished to make a revelation, and sought to attest it by a seal which the general sense of mankind has connected with such a communication, could not thus stamp it by any sign of distinctive power.

Equally futile is the objection that the alleged Bible miracles may be due to evil agency. The deniers of revelation do not themselves believe in such agency, superior to human, yet adverse to

the divine: but only bring it in to perplex and disconcert Christians. But if they borrow this Christian doctrine to turn it against its own adherents, they ought to remember the limitation within which it is held. However Christians may differ as to the amount of confusion which evil beings may be permitted to introduce by working what may be mistaken for miracle, they all hold that under the government of God sufficient light is granted to make the distinction possible to every humble and candid mind, either by the true power which is divine visibly transcending every other, or by moral features in the revelation appealing to conscience, in a way which no pseudo-revelation can counterfeit. The Christian is thus not embarrassed by this *argumentum ad hominem*, and what is equally important to the validity of this reasoning, neither is the theist.

The theist to whom the Christian offers the Bible, and with whom he argues on the ground of miracle, cannot deny that the supreme Power may be able to outshine, even to human eyes, on this field, all rivalry, and still more, to interweave the revelation professedly given with such moral features and accompaniments that no fair observer can trace it up to an evil source. The reasoning of our Lord with the Pharisees, that Satan could not cast out Satan, was, no doubt, addressed to

believers in revelation; but it is equally applicable to believers in God simply, who as such cannot believe in him without believing that all agencies and events are under his control, and that he will not suffer the elements of nature to be so turned out of their course by evil beings as to mimic any supposed signature of God or defeat his purpose—if he has one—thus to confirm a revelation. Who ever heard of any theist who was prepared to say, “I admit an element of miracle, so far as God’s working, otherwise known to us, is concerned. I allow the credibility of miracles in the abstract, and I allow the moral features of the Bible to be reconcilable with a divine origin; but I cannot decide that they have one, because the apparent signs may be due to evil powers not sufficiently restrained”? Now, it is with theists that we reason here, and not with the author of “Supernatural Religion;” and till he can bring us theists who are satisfied on other grounds, but take their last stand against the gospel on this, all his air-drawn difficulties go for nothing.

Having thus endeavored to remove these mistakes as to miracles, it might be our next task, as it is our principal one, to go on to the evidence of fact and history that the Christian miracles have actually been wrought. But in order to do justice to the argument, it is necessary first to state

SOME PRESUMPTIONS WHICH LEAD TO THIS CONCLUSION and predispose the mind, great as the demand made upon faith by miracles is, to concede it. The considerations about to be named are of varying weight; and they are evidences of the truth of Christianity by themselves; nay, in one case, more central to the proof than even miracles; nor are they the only ones that might be named. But they are here brought forward only as leading up and lending help to the direct argument drawn from miracle in the common sense of the word.

There may be mentioned then, *first*, as a presumption in favor of the reality of the Bible miracles, the wonderful nature of the book in which they are recorded. There is here what may be called a *literary* miracle. I do not ask any one at this point to believe in inspiration, and from the self-evident inspiration of the Bible to accept this part of its contents, though there can be little doubt that this self-evident superiority to all other books goes a long way to secure for the Bible claim to inspiration its wide acceptance. But it is not because the book is divinely true that I ask it to be here regarded, but because it is outstandingly wonderful. This fact no one, even the most skeptical, can deny. The Bible is itself a phenomenon, embracing master-pieces in every

department of literature, from the most unlikely hands. Renan, for slight reasons, denies that the Gospel of Matthew is the work of a Jewish publican; but he admits that it is of equally obscure origin, and yet says that, "all things considered, it is the most important book of Christianity, the the most important book that ever has been written."* The Gospel of Luke he grants to be the work of its received author; and says, in regard to the Saviour's birth, "This exquisite pastoral, traced with a gentle outline upon the front of Christianity, has never been surpassed by any strain more fitted to lull the woes of poor humanity;"† and in general he says of this Gospel, "It is the most beautiful book in the world."‡ Of the Gospels as a whole he also says, "The composition of the Gospels is, next to the personal action of Jesus, the capital fact in the history of the origin of Christianity; I will add, in the history of humanity."§ It would be easy, were it necessary, to quote other tributes to the stupendous literary greatness of the Bible. One may be taken from Gibbon, where he contrasts the book of Job with the Koran; and it is all the more remarkable as belonging to a century in which, as Macaulay says, Voltaire decried Ezekiel in the same

* "Evangiles," page 212.

† Page 283.

‡ Page 278.

§ Page 213.

narrow spirit as he did Shakespeare. "The harmony and copiousness of style will not reach in a version the European infidel: he will peruse with impatience the endless incoherent rhapsody of faith and precept and declamation, which seldom excites a sentiment or an idea, which sometimes crawls in the dust and is sometimes lost in the clouds. The divine attributes exalt the fancy of the Arabian missionary; but his loftiest strains must yield to the sublime simplicity of the book of Job, composed in a remote age, in the same country, and in the same language."* The Bible is confessedly the greatest classic in the English or German language, we may add, even in the French: and its influence has immeasurably transcended that of all others. Does not this agree with the supposition of miracle in connection with the system to which it belongs? Could the presumption be greater? and how world-wide is the contrast, as Gibbon acknowledges in regard to Mohammedanism, with every other religion?

A *second* presumption, even stronger, for the reality of the Bible miracles, is *the transcendent character of the morality* with which they are associated. At no point has Christianity come out of the struggle of centuries stronger than here. The greatest of moralists like Kant have treated

* Gibbon (Bohn's Ed.), Vol. V. p. 474.

the New Testament as containing a full moral system; and attacks on the Christian morality, as erring, either by excess or defect, have to a large extent ceased. Mr. Mill, who, in his essay on "Liberty," had charged Christianity on this head with at least incompleteness, has in one of his posthumous "Essays" made the remarkable statement that no one could find a better rule of life than to act in every case so as that Christ would approve of his conduct. The only really influential objections to the Christian morality are those connected with its difficulty, and its failure to realize itself among professed Christians; and this has caused the gospel to suffer more than all other hindrances put together, for the inconsistencies of Christian nations and churches have been seen and read of all men, while the excuses for those failures, and even the attempts to clear Christianity from this reproach, have not been equally successful in impressing the general mind. Still it is a great and singular thing for any system of morality to be complained of chiefly because it is too high and ideal; while at the same time all candid minds allow that Christianity has here been immensely effectual in elevating the moral standard of the world, and in bringing round a state of things when its own strictness and elevation shall seem less hopeless as a prevailing as-

piration and attainment. What is true of the New Testament here is inclusive of the Old. They must be partial judges who deny here a radical identity, which Christ himself and his apostles, notwithstanding some difficulties of fact and interpretation, acknowledged between the earlier and later development of the same revelation. The Old Testament had something of the same height relatively to everything outside itself as the teaching and institutions of Christianity still have; for what could be found among ancient nations with anything of the same practical weight and impression as the Decalogue, the Psalms, the book of Proverbs, and the moral lessons of the Prophets? while these have all been found capable of being taken up into, and mingling their force with, the mightier impulses of Christianity. That a great moral system like this should be connected with miracle, and gain its support, is something totally different from the transient, scattered, and for the most part legendary and useless miracles that rise up out of the mere love of the marvellous or under the spell of superstition. The purpose is truly great and godlike, worthy of miracle if miracle could help, and, taken in conjunction with the success which has followed, warrants the presumption that miracle has here been at work, and not in vain.

The *third* and the only other presumption which shall be noticed here for the reality of the Bible miracles, is their *harmony with the doctrinal system* which they are brought in to establish. It is a common fault of those who undervalue miracles to overlook this, and to treat the miracle and the doctrine as something belonging to different spheres, and only externally applied to each other, somehow as the royal stamp on a book is to its contents. But in point of fact, the whole of Christianity relatively to ordinary teaching is inward miracle; and out of this the miracle, commonly so called, grows as a product, and hence as a witness. The common Christian view of the birth of Jesus Christ—of the union in him of the divine and human natures—of his atonement and intercession, and of his exaltation to dispense the Holy Ghost and reign over the spirits of men in his church, and even outwardly in the universe, all this is so far from being God's visibly ordinary way of action as disclosed in natural providence, that it rises above the thoughts of men as far as the heavens are above the earth. Hence this scheme, in its whole texture supernatural, cannot be carried through without special acts occurring that have been distinctively called miracles, though they are not more miraculous than the rest. For one who is God incarnate to

rise from the dead is not more miraculous than to be God incarnate; nor is it so to ascend to heaven, and thence to usher in the day of Pentecost, and to control and govern the church by his Holy Spirit. There must be miracle, if there is to be salvation. The laws of human nature must be transcended by the divine being united with the human. The human body could not be surrendered to defeat, and the incarnation so far be made void by the Saviour remaining in the grave. Nor could the same law that applied to others who were raised, limit the risen life of Christ, or detain him upon earth. Miracles had thus, according to the true Christian conception, a deeper design than to be evidences of Christianity. They had to be vital and integral parts of Christianity. But this did not hinder them from being evidences too; and as evidences they have a reason and a credibility which would be wholly wanting if they were extraneous and supplementary parts engrafted upon an otherwise non-miraculous system. Take for example our Lord's so-called miracles of healing. Would it have been more credible that the Son of God, invested with divine powers, should stand in the midst of human disease and misery without any outbursts of mightier sympathy and help, and that he should be warned back by the very laws of nature that were his own creation?

Or is it not credible that he should in these cures have revealed and imaged his deeper power to heal the soul? When from the starting-point of Christianity he could not be a Saviour at all without miracle, is there not in the expansion and development of this principle, and in the applying of it as he does to support his own claims, a beautiful inward harmony which is a presumption of truth, so that never could any religion set forth this evidence from so lofty and consistent a ground as that of Him who says, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works."

With these explanatory and introductory remarks, it is now time to consider the argument for the reality of the Bible MIRACLES AS POSITIVELY ATTESTED BY HISTORY. The argument is very extended, taking in the Old Testament as well as the New. But it has been universally felt that the strength of the argument lies most in the New Testament period, because, while the Old Testament wonders are sufficiently attested, and are even vouched for in the New Testament, while also held up by the ever-increasing authority of the Old Testament in matters of ordinary history, there is not the same abundance of con-

temporary literature, nor reigning clearness in regard to the authorship of books and similar matters affecting testimony. The question shall, therefore, be limited to the miracles of the New Testament, though every one can see that the miracles of the Old Testament are not to be looked on as a hindrance, but a help; and we can understand how different our position would have been had the New Testament revelation been confirmed by striking miracles, while the Old Testament oracles did not enjoy the help of so much as one. Again, among the New Testament miracles, those of Christ himself are the most fitted to attract close and prolonged study; and among these, by universal consent, one stands out as pre-eminently important, the miracle of his resurrection. Even an unbeliever may be impressed by the thought that Christ (as recorded) rested his claims on this sign, in preference to others; for it has turned out to be the strongest, and this by any natural means Christ could not have known.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

In considering the evidence of Christ's resurrection, the same method is perhaps best taken which is employed in any other question of fact. Nothing is taken for granted, but that a miracle like the resurrection may be a fact of history: all

else is proved like any other matter which history may embrace. And this is proved by three sets of arguments: *first*, the positive testimonies, more or less direct, to the fact of the resurrection; *secondly*, the agreement of this supposition with other facts in the history; and, *thirdly*, the failure of every other supposition opposed to the resurrection to account for these facts.

In discussing, then, the testimonies, it is best to begin with those that are farthest off from the centre; and here there is to be placed in the outer circle the unanimous, unbroken *belief of the whole Christian church of the first century* from the beginning. This indeed is not direct testimony; but it is testimony in so far as the consenting belief of contemporaries who are interested in a matter of fact, and have every motive to test it, is testimony to its historical reality. No Christian could become one without believing in the resurrection, and without avowing it. Christianity was thus built on alleged fact from the beginning, as if Mohammed had been held to have been killed in one of his battles, and to have returned to life. There are modern Christians, so-called, who think the resurrection of Christ unimportant; but not so then. The belief was universal, and was accounted vital. Celsus ridicules Christians for believing on so slender an evidence as that of an excited

woman; but he allows the uniformity of the belief. Nor did it grow up by degrees, but was as strong from the first, as we see among other proofs, from the observance of the "Lord's day." This is mentioned in Rev. 1:10 as already in use in Asia Minor; and this writing is carried up by the most extreme critics of our time to a date before the fall of Jerusalem, and regarded by many of them, who accept so little as apostolic, as the work of the apostle John. Nothing but belief in a fact behind it—a fact which to their own mind they had sufficiently verified—could have led Jew and Gentile thus to break away from their old calendar, and put first in the new a once despised and rejected name. It was on this "stated" day (*die stato*), as Pliny tells us, that the Christians met to sing hymns to Christ as God, and that, as Justin Martyr, about the middle of the second century, assures us, they dedicated the once pagan day of the sun as a memorial alike of the old and new creation. But it is needless to enlarge on this universal, immediate, unbroken, monumentally-confirmed testimony. The whole New Testament, besides what is specially devoted to express testimonies, is here a voucher of belief; for hardly a book of it but contains some distinct reference to the faith of Christians in this fundamental fact of Christianity.

When we pass beyond this widest circle, including all Christian men, we come to a much narrower, made up of *Christian writers*, who attest the result of their inquiries or their own actual knowledge in regard to the fact of the resurrection. Those who state the results of inquiries are the two evangelists, Mark and Luke; those who have been generally believed to have been eye-witnesses are the evangelists Matthew and John; while the apostle Paul stands between the two classes, not originally a witness of the resurrection scenes, but having later intercourse with the risen Jesus. In examining this various testimony we have, in arguing with others, to leave out of account the inspiration of the writers as Christians believe in it, and consider only their capacities as recorders and witnesses of fact; and we have in the same way to accept the best conclusions, on ordinary historical grounds, as to the genuineness and antiquity of the four Gospels and the writings of Paul which bear on this subject.

The questions of a critical nature as to date and authorship which arise have naturally occupied much attention; but the results may be very briefly stated. The fundamental passage of Paul in 1 Cor. 15 is uncontested by the most extreme criticism. In like manner, the hasty allegations of Baur and Strauss as to a very late date of Mark

and Luke, have been recalled, among others by Renan, who concedes that the Gospel of Mark is the work of the companion of Peter, and Luke that of the companion of Paul, who also writes the Acts. So, also, the whole of recent discussion is favorable to the genuineness of the Gospel of John. Sixty years ago Eichhorn, the leader of rationalist criticism in Germany, would not listen to any objections to the received view. Now, after a long and most earnest debate, the tendency—even of rationalism—is to return to the old position; while the highest names of the semi-rationalist school—Bleek and Ewald—have never countenanced this deviation; and more orthodox writers, like Beyschlag and Luthardt, have met it at every point—the aberration being all through in Britain and America wondered at rather than followed. The Gospel of Matthew has also profited by recent criticism in Germany, which has floated it back to a much earlier date than was contended for by Strauss; and the old received opinion, that its author was an apostle and an eye-witness, has not been essentially shaken, whatever difficulties may arise from the statements of early writers as to a separate Hebrew and Greek form of his Gospel, and the want of materials thoroughly to clear up this critical question. It may be added that the case would not be vitally

altered in regard to the resurrection were the Gospel of Matthew—as all moderate rationalism admits—an ordinarily good historical record of the first century, and connected with the inner Christian circle, like the Gospels of Mark and Luke. Strauss, among others, uses Matthew as sufficiently trustworthy to found an estimate of the Saviour's life upon; and if unbelievers may use it historically for their purposes, why should its value cease in the hands of Christians?

What is now the bearing and worth of this mass of testimony? It is impossible to examine it in detail; but two main points, independent of each other, stand out—the discovery on the morning of the third day that the tomb was empty, and the various appearances of Jesus to his disciples, by whom he was recognized. Paul vouches only for the appearances; but the evangelists also for the finding of the tomb empty. In regard to this latter point, the indications in Matthew and Mark are verified by the actual explorations in Luke and John; so that, if we attach any credit to these writers at all, the fact is proved. Nor did it need any special witness, for it was not in itself a miracle to find a tomb empty where a body had lain. But much more various, strong, and, as befitted the case, singular in their force as evidence, are the recorded appearances of the risen Saviour.

There are appearances common to all the Gospels: that to Mary Magdalene, and if we grant the last verses of Mark 16, that to all the apostles, which is also affirmed by Paul. There is in all the Gospels the similar part played by women. There is in all an original element of doubt and fear in connection with the fact of resurrection; and there starts up in all a most wonderful mental and spiritual likeness of the risen Saviour to his former self, as, for example, in Matthew and Mark (as supplemented), the apostolic commission; in Luke, the discourse on the way to Emmaus; in John, the scenes with Mary, with Thomas, and at the Sea of Galilee. We can thus see for ourselves the very process by which the disciples were convinced, and can judge of its reasonableness; for, convincing as the bodily marks were, the evidence of resurrection lies even more in identity of soul than of body, and we can feel how unspeakably beyond invention were these incidents and utterances, while also so full of the past and so pregnant with the future.

The argument is rounded off by the appearances that are recorded by separate writers—one or more—as in Paul those to Peter and James, in Matthew to the women, and so of others. It has been made an objection that there is not room for all the appearances; but this has never been

proved, and, on the contrary, in forty days there was opportunity, as the narrative bears, for more. And however difficult it may be to harmonize all the accounts, especially as to the first day, this, as has often been remarked, is the inevitable accompaniment of all narratives, however authentic, that travel over the same ground. It is wonderful how much has been done by scholars to show the compatibility of one part of the various records with the rest; and though this is probably an insoluble problem, it is striking how slight hints in one Gospel or in Paul are borne out in some other place. Thus, our Lord's appearance to Peter in 1 Cor. 15 is confirmed by the message in Mark to Peter; the race of Peter to the sepulchre in Luke is enlarged in the fourth Gospel into that of Peter and John; and the appearances in Galilee, of which there is not a word in Luke, reappear in the last of the Gospels. Incidents like these go a long way to balance alleged discords, and show that we are on the track not of fabrication or license, but of real, though various, history.

One great merit of this testimony is, that it is not carefully adjusted and dovetailed into a legal argument. Some critics have rashly wished for this, and have blamed the Gospels because they are not cast in the mould of a *procès verbal*, signed

and countersigned by witnesses and authorities. The Gospels were not written to prove a series of points so much as artlessly to unfold the life, death, and victory of their great subject; and the delineation of character is more with them than the establishment of incident. But with all their disregard of legal dress and technical vouchers, how strong is the body of proof which these writers have piled up almost unconsciously into one of the clearest of moral demonstrations! Could the apostle Paul have thrown out at random, when speaking with the solemnity of an oath, a set of impressions as to Christ's appearances which he had rashly taken up, even to the extent of asserting one made to more than five hundred persons at once, the most of whom are affirmed to be still, after a quarter of a century, alive, while others are known to be dead? De Wette could not resist this testimony, but says in his "Commentary," "The testimony of the apostle decides as to the certainty of the fact." But how many critics of inferior order have supposed that a writer like Paul, who was so entirely at home in every matter affecting what to him was the very centre of existence, could, when laying down the very articles of faith and hope, have been so ignorant or so careless as to have made the most circumstantial statements of fact without inquiry or

foundation. Not less strong is Luke, who is admitted by Renan to have been the companion of Paul, and consequently with him, in Jerusalem and in Cæsarea, during his imprisonment of two years. How fresh must everything still have been, after the lapse of six or seven and twenty years, to an eager investigator, who doubtless met in Palestine with eye-witnesses of the Gospel history, and who in his Gospel claims to have "traced the course of all things accurately from the first." (Revised Version.) Mark likewise, whose authorship is not questioned, belongs to the most select circle of the companions of the apostles, the friend and fellow-laborer of Paul and Peter, the nephew of Barnabas, and more even than Luke mixed up with the rise of the new faith, as a Jerusalem Christian, and one whose personal recollections went back to the time of the ministry and death of Jesus. Still stronger is the testimony of the fourth Gospel, as the work of an eye-witness, of a leading apostle, and of our Lord's most intimate human friend. The deniers of the supernatural were bound sooner or later to have disputed this work, for it does not seem that their position can possibly endure its uncontested authority. But now that they have made the utmost effort in this direction, and failed, the evidence of the resurrection comes forth all the clearer from one to

whom the face and form of his Master were the most cherished of remembrances, who had been at the bottom of His empty grave, and who was fitted as none other to catch and to perpetuate the spiritual features, as well as the bodily, which re-appeared, brightened but not altered by the victory over death. The testimony of Matthew—another eye-witness, and from the more Judaic side of Christian teaching—confirms the record; and it is worthy of notice, in reply to those who have sought by an alleged fundamental discord in doctrine to invalidate the evidence for the resurrection and other gospel facts, how the fact of the resurrection is as necessary to the first Gospel as to the fourth, leading in as it does the fullest statement of the Trinity, taking up the lessons of the baptism and the transfiguration, and harmonizing with itself utterances ever-recurring, as in Matt. 11:25-30, of a grandeur and sublimity not distinguishable from those of the last of the evangelists.

Let it be added that we have, not only in the existence of these written testimonies, but also in their reception and public use from the beginning in the Christian church (which is something distinct from the universal belief in the resurrection), a powerful argument. The Gospels were used as soon as they existed. For this we have

the testimony of Justin Martyr in his first Apology (chap. 67); and all that has been said to shake this position leaves their alleged coming into use between their origin and his day, which after all was in much less than a century, wholly unexplained. It was thus not a mere generality as to the resurrection that the church took up, but particular narratives, full, circumstantial, and capable at every point of contradiction or verification. No history has ever received such an adhesion, for the original witnesses and converts were but a handful; and every accession of new converts carried with it a guarantee never equalled for sincerity and conviction, and that on the part of men thoroughly competent to inquire for themselves.

This brings us to the *second* point necessary to be urged, in addition to the separate weight of the testimonies, viz., how far the admission of the resurrection accounts for *other undeniable facts of the history*. Among these, two stand out pre-eminent as rationally accounted for by the fact of the resurrection. The one is the change of mind produced on the disciples, and the other is the impression made on the world by the Christianity which began immediately to be proclaimed. The first of these facts is incontestable. We know indeed only from the Scripture narrative itself of the extreme depression of the apostles, and of the

joy and confidence which succeeded. But nothing was so natural as the shock given them by the crucifixion; and nothing was ever more naturally described. How then did this give place? Nothing so completely accounts for it as the great event which came between, and the operation of this is in the Gospels a beautiful mental study. It has been asked, indeed, why the apostles were not more cheerful if Christ had promised to return. But the mistake as to the meaning of his death rather overwhelmed them with disappointment than allowed hope to revive, and a new and joyful fact was the only thing that could work a change. There is a profundity, as well as a simplicity, in this part of the gospel history which has always been admired; and when the resurrection is denied, the change to hopefulness sinks into mere weakness and enthusiasm. Dr. Baur, the leader of the Tübingen school, never missed the mark more than when he said that it is of no consequence how the apostles came by the belief of the resurrection, for the mere belief would anyhow do the same work. This is to build the world upon delusion, and to make groundless fancy as a moral force equal to the natural, steady, and effectual action of truth.

Still more impressive is the harmony between the resurrection, taken as a reality, and the start

it gave the infant and apparently defeated Christian cause. Lessing was so struck with this that, in spite of all the difficulties which he found in the resurrection story as now before us, he felt that truth lay at the bottom of what so prevailed. The church becomes the aggressor, and the world yields. It is lamentable if, in such a case, humanity could not hold its own against mental weakness. Strauss has bitterly complained of belief in the resurrection as the "humbug of history." But the unreasonableness of belief in it as not a fact, is the exact measure of the reasonableness of belief in it as a fact which could not be gainsaid. It is the test of its suitability to solve the history. It explains the helplessness of the adverse party, the paralysis which hindered every effort at confutation or exposure as by the production of the Saviour's body, and the depression which shut up the Jewish opposition to silence or to unreasoning violence. It also accounts for such wild rumors as that the disciples had stolen the body. This has been charged home as a Christian slander on the Jewish authorities. But the Christians had no motive to invent such a calumny, which evidently comes from the other camp. And it must be remembered that much as this report has been scouted by recent unbelief, so scouted that it has been utterly denied to have

had a place in the thoughts of the Jewish rulers, it was, though a weak invention, such a one as men fall upon when perplexed and baffled; and so late as last century the truth of it was made by Woolston the basis of his attack on the credibility of the resurrection.

Having thus shown the sufficiency of the great fact of the resurrection to clear the field of history all round, it only remains to touch on our *third point*, viz., *the discord with history which the denial of the resurrection introduces*. So far as this is the opposite of what has been already urged, it has been virtually considered. But there is more than a blank; there is a positive collision, when the denier of the resurrection goes on to give some positive theory of how the alleged resurrection originated, and seeks on the ground of that theory to explain the facts of the case. A rapid review then of the negative theories of the resurrection will close this paper.

The weakest of all the theories is that which traces up the current belief in the resurrection to fraud and imposture on the part of Christ's disciples. This is one of the controversies which the Christian church has outlived; and though it survived from Celsus down to the Wolfenbüttel fragmentist of last century, there is no school of unbelief that would now give it, even as an alter-

native, a place on its record. This theory will suit nothing, not even the disappearance of the body. The narrative has to be falsified by the denial that the tomb was sealed and guarded; and the courage and daring of the apostles have to be unhistorically exalted. The moral contradiction is still more outrageous. The greatest of moralists leaves his disciples capable of this infamy; and his influence, in spite of this scandal, through these impure instruments, immediately begins to elevate the world.

Equally incredible, though not quite so monstrous, is the theory that Christ did not really die, but only swooned on the cross, and that he emerged from the grave and showed himself alive to his disciples. This so far attempts, like the first theory, to account for the empty tomb, but goes beyond it in explaining also the supposed appearances. But it really violates the history at every point. It violates the history of the crucifixion, for our Lord received a special wound to make sure of his death; it violates the history of the burial; for even, if recovered from a swoon, he could have found no means of extrication; and it violates the history of the appearances of resurrection, for Christ could not thus have suddenly recovered and his disciples never suppose him a returned survivor of the last penalty, but

always one actually risen. This scheme disagrees with the character of Christ's enemies, who would not have done their work so slackly; of his friends, who could not have made such a mistake, or received such an impulse from a mere natural return; and most of all, of Christ himself, who could not have so acted as to have suffered such a delusion to arise as that his case was one of resurrection, and must have come out of his hiding-place to have exposed it. This theory is only worthy of the naturalism of a Paulus; and though the genius of Schleiermacher has unhappily condescended to it, it is one of those eccentricities which do not even set a fashion, but after a day's wonder pass away.

The only theory that is now seriously and widely held is what is called *the vision theory*, or that Christ's disciples, through the influence of love or faith, or some other principle distinct from wilful error, were led mistakenly to believe that their Master had returned from the dead, and propagated the accounts of these mere visions as actual appearances. This is the view set forth by Strauss and Renan in their well-known works, though Renan inconsistently adds on to this the theory of fraud, and supposes it conceivable that Mary Magdalene and the other women had something to do with the transfer of the body. These

writers further differ, Strauss in supposing that the appearances, due to the action of imaginative love and longing, only began in Galilee, and that the disciples after a long interval returned to Jerusalem to start the report and found the Christian church; whereas Renan makes all begin immediately in Jerusalem. Each of these writers, in setting aside the other, attests the strength of the Christian position; for if all began in Jerusalem and began at once, by the appearances immediately happening, and being appealed to there, Strauss seems to feel that the resurrection must be a fact; while Renan probably realizes the difficulty of contradicting the evangelists here as to place and time, and yet founding anything anywhere on their testimony. As it is, the difficulties of Strauss, who is here the better advocate of unbelief of the two, are immense. He has not only to create in Galilee, amid disappointment and defeat, and with no prophecy of resurrection, a mood of mind that made belief in resurrection easy; but when the disciples return to Jerusalem the appearances of the risen Christ are to be vouchsafed to meetings of any size, and after a long silence, to help them in reviving an unwelcome and fading memory; while thus excited and even fanatical, the Jewish Christians are to be so lofty and earnest in spirit as to shake the skepti-

cism of Paul, and predispose him to a similar vision and testimony; yet these visions of the risen One are suddenly to end, and without them Christianity is to prevail in regions where neither risen Christ nor unrisen had ever been heard of or expected. If the resurrection demands faith, it cannot be said that this theory, which is perhaps the best that can be offered, dispenses with it; and we see how little it fills up the gap in the fact that Baur prefers to leave the whole subject of the resurrection of Christ a mystery; and Keim, though otherwise disposed to leave out miracle, is prepared to grant its ingress here a last possibility, and to conceive that the glorified spirit of Jesus so acted on his disciples that they confounded it with his material presence. Against these visionary schemes the clear testimonies of the evangelists and of Paul maintain their place.

Attempts have been made to shake the authority of Paul by urging that his own vision of Christ, which he connects with the rest, was only inward. But this is supported by nothing in his other references to this memorable event which in Acts affects to blindness his bodily sense; nor can we well understand a visionary appearance extended to five hundred witnesses, or by any fairness of interpretation introduce into

this an argument for the literal resurrection of the body, the very turning-point of which lies in Christ's resurrection being itself real and literal.

We are here, then, towards the end of the nineteenth century, as unprovided with any deliverance from the historical necessity of accepting the resurrection of Christ and other Gospel miracles, as in the first century; and the whole process of criticism and philosophy has simply been to show that if the supernatural is cognizable and provable, it is here manifested and proved. No one can admit, or has ever admitted, the resurrection miracle, without granting the others in the Gospel history. The apostle Paul, in words not contested by the most extreme criticism, claims to have wrought miracles in his own person, and claims this as what belonged to other apostles. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds." 2 Cor. 12:12. The miraculous element in the Old Testament will not be contested by those who admit it in connection with Christianity, or who allow a single prophecy of Christ, or indeed any revelation before his advent. Thus, where resistance is overcome at one point, it yields throughout; and though it is

a quite lawful question whether some particular occurrences are held forth in Scripture as miraculous in character, the general reign of miracle is established.

The Christian church, indeed, is far from saying that the mere historic belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or in other miracles, will of itself make any man a Christian, for he must add to this—or, rather, have added by a higher grace—a discernment of the divine greatness of Christ as a Saviour from sin by his sacrifice, and a reliance upon this and the other provisions of the Christian remedy, which are all connected with Christ's death and resurrection. Nor is it held by the Christian church that the argument from miracles is the only avenue by which the presence of God in support of Christianity may reveal itself, and lead up to that higher faith in which the more historical belief that is thus variously strengthened has its true and saving consummation. At the same time it must be held that if the Christian scheme be not founded on fact, and attested by historic evidence, its saving applications and influences must be cut off, and rendered through any other channel impossible; so that while the historic proof of Christianity does not make Christian faith, its historic disproof would unmake it. It is in this deep and important sense that the ar-

gument for miracles is contended for in this tract, and, as the writer rejoices to believe, by an ever-growing host of earnest apologists; and it is his prayer that however the cause must ever transcend the best powers of the advocate, it may not be contended for in vain.

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